

The Impact of COVID-19 on Human Fertility Behaviour

Elizabeth Wilkins, INED, France / Consultant,
UNFPA APRO

Rintaro Mori, PhD., UNFPA APRO

Prof. Stuart Gietel-Basten, The Hong Kong
University of Science and Technology



- Impacts of COVID-19 on fertility relatively less explored, but important
 - **Individual fertility choices**

- Conducted a **literature review of potential impacts of COVID-19 on fertility** (107 records)
 - Proxy situations + early evidence from COVID-19
 - Case studies: The Philippines, Vietnam, Islamic Rep. of Iran, Japan

- Other recent reviews on impact on fertility
 - Aassve, A. et al (2020) Science, 369(6502): 370-372
 - The Economist article 28th Oct 2020
<https://www.economist.com/international/2020/10/28/the-pandemic-may-be-leading-to-fewer-babies-in-rich-countries>

- **Unique combination of factors**
- The pandemic is **ongoing**
- **Nine month lag** between conception and births

1. Access to family planning

2. Gender roles and division of domestic labour

3. Economic recession and uncertainty

*The review focused on 5 dimensions, but here we discuss the 3 most important dimensions

The impact is unlikely to be uniform

➤ Between countries:

	Low-Income Countries	High-Income Countries
Dimension of COVID-19	Potential impact on fertility	
1. Access to family planning	Increase in unintended pregnancies in 2020/21	Minimal effect
2. Gender roles and division of domestic labour	Stalled fertility decline?	↓ period TFR
3. Economic recession and uncertainty	?	↓ period TFR

- Impacts conditioned by **policies, institutional environment and cultural factors**
- **Within countries:** greatest constraints on fertility choices for already vulnerable groups: poor, marginalised communities and informal and migrant workers

1. Address barriers in access to FP

→ Designate FP as essential service, strengthen FP supply chains, consider relaxation of dispensing rules, telemedicine

2. Address unequal gender division of domestic labour

→ Prioritising affordable and accessible childcare services, flexible working options, gender awareness and behaviour change campaigns

3. Mitigate effects of economic recession

→ Job retention schemes, strengthened social welfare system, extension of coverage to informal workers

➤ **The response to COVID-19 offers an opportunity to recognise and address key barriers to fertility choices**

THANK YOU